

Journal of the National Archaeological Museum Aruba, issue no. 1

CEQUE



Aruba, an island navigating a globalizing world:
A brief history

Ceque: Journal of the National Archaeological Museum Aruba, issue # 1, 2009

About the name:

Ceque is a Caquetío word, which means *shoco* (in Papiamentu) and “owl” (in English). Recalled from our extinct native language, *ceque* highlights Aruba’s cultural past. It reflects Aruban wisdom and all that has been left to us within the cultural realm of our island. Because the word *ceque* retains a link to the Caquetío, it is associated with history and/or archaeology, but it is, in reality, multi-functional.; it’s part of our language, nature, history, archaeology, anthropology, and so much more. Interestingly the word Papiamentu word “*shoco*” is also an Amerindian word. The question that may come to mind is this: “Why do we use the Amerindian word “*shoco*” to refer to an owl and not the Caquetío word “*ceque*”? Amerindian words in Papiamentu are not normally Caquetío, but are universal words used in many other languages (e.g. names of species, flora, fauna, and toponyms) that the Europeans absorbed into their languages; some examples (among many others) are canoa, hammock, tomato, and maraca. Obviously, “*shoco*” isn’t a universal word, as it is only used in Papiamentu. So, why do we in Aruba choose to refer to the owl using the word “*shoco*” and not “*ceque*”?

© 2009

National Archaeological Museum Aruba
Schelpstraat 42,
Oranjestad,
Aruba
Tel : 297-582-8979
Fax: 297-583-8267
e-mail: archeo@setarnet.aw

Editorial Board:
Dr. Marlene Linville
drs. Raymundo Dijkhoff

Cover Design & Layout by Dot Visuals, Aruba
www.dotvisuals.com

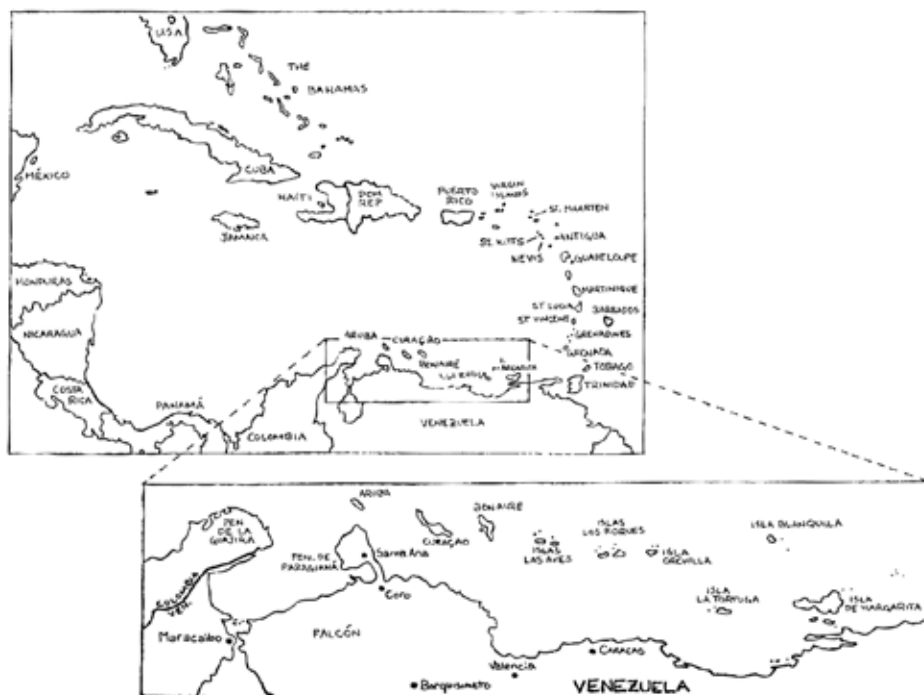
On the cover:
Athene cunicularia arubensis. The ‘shoko’ is an endemic sub-species of Aruba. She digs holes in the ground where she lays her eggs.
(Spaans Lagoen, photo by Diego Marquez, National Park Arikok)

In this Issue

Aruba, an island navigating a globalizing world:

A brief history

by drs. Eduard Dresscher



- The island Aruba in its geographical context (Dijkhoff and Linville 2004:2).

Aruba, an island navigating a globalizing world: *A brief history*

In the history of the Netherlands, the seventeenth century is often referred to as the “Golden Age.” During this period, the Dutch economy, science, and art were among the most renowned of the period. The thriving economy was largely the result of the successful Dutch trade. While the wealth of most European countries was limited to trade within Europe, the Dutch sailed the world in search of its riches. Thus, the period is closely linked with the beginning of the Dutch colonial era. Though closely related to this era, the subject of this article is not Dutch riches, but their absence, or, to phrase it more precisely, the absence of anything the Dutch thought of value. Here is the story of an island where the Dutch found little they desired, but they colonized nonetheless. This island is called Aruba.

Aruba is a small island, situated a mere seventeen miles off the coast of Venezuela. Even though it was never considered important by the colonial government, the island managed to make a name for itself. Over the last hundred years Aruban society has witnessed substantial economic and demographic growth. The host to several multinational businesses Aruba has become, as a result, a melting pot of many different cultures.

These changes are usually attributed to the advent of the oil industry in the 1920s, and, in more recent years, to the booming tourism industry. From an economic point of view this is undeniably the case. However, I would argue that these developments are more deeply rooted in Aruban society than is usually assumed. The radical breach this assumption suggests does injustice to the continuity of Aruban history. In this paper I intend to demonstrate how these developments have been a part of Aruban society since the arrival of the Dutch around 1636.

This paper aims to place the outline of Aruba's history in a broader, geopolitical perspective, one that sways from the usual local and colonial paradigms. It is important to note that this paper is but a brief overview; in no way does it pretend to capture all of the facets of the rich Aruban history. In order to give a clear view of this, I have elected to divide into five periods the history of Aruba since its ‘discovery’ by the Spanish: 1) The Spanish period (1499 to 1636); 2) the period of the Dutch West

India Company (1636 to 1792); 3) the period of the Dutch Kingdom (1792 to 1924);¹ 4) the period of the Lago oil company (1924 to 1986); and 5) the period of the *status aparte* and tourism (1986-present).



- A drawing by Theodor de Bry of the 'Island of the Giants'. According to *Mundus Novus*, a letter ascribed to Vespucci, the Spanish encountered giants on Curaçao (De Bry, 1631: 27; in Coomans-Eustatia and Coomans 1987:15).

An island near the coast: Aruba under Spanish rule (1499 to 1636)

Before we travel back to the year 1636, it is necessary to dwell a little on Aruba's encounter with the Spanish, and the period under their rule. The exact date when the Spanish came to Aruba for the first time is uncertain. According to Raymundo Dijkhoff, many researchers have attempted to pinpoint the date of the first arrival

¹ The period of the Dutch Kingdom does not end in 1924, as Aruba is to this day part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. This date merely signifies the beginning of the oil era, signalling the shift in influences on the island around this time.

of the Spanish, to no avail. Around 1499, Alonso de Ojeda, Amerigo Vespucci, and Juan de la Cosa encountered Curaçao (and possibly Aruba and Bonaire). Ojeda described the islands he saw as the '*Islas adyacentes a la costa firme*' ("islands adjacent to the mainland") [translation by author]. It is doubtful that Aruba was among these islands. The map they drew up after this trip, the *mapamundi*, only shows two islands, and it is fairly certain Aruba is not one of these islands. It is plausible that the Spanish first learned of Aruba between the years 1502 and 1505.²

On Aruba, the Spanish encountered a group of native Amerindians speaking an Arawakan language. These Amerindians, called Caquetíos, inhabited the coastal regions of the mainland and the ABC islands. Before the arrival of the Spanish, strong economic, political, and cultural bonds existed between the Caquetíos of the coastal region and the ones inhabiting the islands. They were united under chieftains, called *caciques*, of whom the cacique of Paraguaná (the Venezuelan peninsula east of Lake Maracaibo) was recognized as the highest authority to which all others were subordinate (Goslinga 1979:4,6). Aruba might have been one of several trading outposts of the coastal Caquetíos (Dijkhoff 1997:78).

In June of 1501, after he returned to Spain, Ojeda was appointed governor over the coastal regions of Coquibacoa (Coro) and Guajira, forming one administrative entity to which the 'islas adyacentes' belonged. In general, the European encounter with the 'New World' had severe implications for the Amerindian communities; within one or two generations most of the islands of the Caribbean had lost over 80% of their Amerindian populations (Versteeg 1991:21). This was certainly the case for Aruba. In 1513, the Spanish decided that the ABC islands were useless ('Islas Inútiles'), and deported the inhabitants more than 400 miles away, to Hispaniola (modern-day Haiti and the Dominican Republic), where they were enslaved. By 1515, most of the Aruban population had been deported (Dijkhoff 1997:82; Linville 2005:82, 87). In this respect, the arrival of the Spanish not only resulted in great changes for the Amerindian society on Aruba, it also meant a disruption of inter-group connections and economic ties throughout the entire region.

This disruption did not entirely end the ties between Aruba and the mainland. The history of Aruba, Bonaire and Curaçao under the Spanish remained closely related

² Dijkhoff, R. A. C. F. Aruba 500 Years? *Historia di Aruba*.
<http://web.archive.org/web/20010412153456/arubafm.com/aruba5001.htm>, (accessed July 8, 2009).

to that of the mainland area known today as Venezuela. In 1511, Charles V, Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire and King of Spain, appointed Juan Martínez de Ampués Royal Factor for Hispaniola. In 1525, the ABC islands came under his protection. De Ampués viewed the Caquetíos favorably. In 1526, he came to an agreement with Manaure, the ‘paramount chief’ (‘cacique suprême’) of Coro, who lived on the Paraguaná peninsula. They agreed on the return and protection of the Caquetíos. De Ampués even brought some of the Caquetíos back to Curaçao and Aruba. Upon visiting the islands, De Ampués found Amerindians from the mainland; this suggests that the flow of migration between the islands and the mainland had never ceased. Slave hunting on Aruba was declared illegal; from then on ships only visited the island to extract Brasil wood, which was used to make red dye (Dijkhoff 1997:83).

The colonization of the islands by De Ampués was not altruistic; it was part of his plan to gain control over the whole area³. De Ampués attempts to control the region failed. Charles V did not give him the rights to the mainland. The reason for this lay in Charles V’s considerable debts to a German banking family, the Welsers. The Welser banking firm had offered to settle part of the king’s debt in exchange for the trade rights to the Venezuela region. Charles V, in dire need of money, accepted this proposal. The Welser period (1529-1556) was particularly dire for the Caquetíos of the mainland, and drove many of them to flee to the ABC islands (Dijkhoff 1997: 84).

The ABC islands were united into a captainship, the *Capitanía de Curazao*, of which De Ampués retained control. He became *veedor* (governor) of Aruba, but never visited the island. In 1528 or 1529 he returned to Hispaniola where he died in 1533 (Dijkhoff 1997:84). After the failure of De Ampués’ ambitious plans, the Spanish used Aruba primarily as a ‘rancho’ (a large ranch), leaving animals (including goats, sheep, dogs, donkeys, cows, and pigs) to freely roam the island (Hartog 1980:30-31, 34). Aruba was inhabited by a group of Amerindians converted to Christianity, Spanish and Amerindian languages, especially Caquetío, were spoken widely on the island (Dijkhoff 1997:84). These Amerindians probably made their living by tending the livestock of the Spanish, a situation that lasted until the Dutch conquered the islands, ending the Spanish reign (Linville 2005:87).

³ He and Manaure made a treaty at Coro that in exchange for protection Manaure would capture slaves for De Ampués (Dijkhoff 1997:83).

Corporate isolation, Aruba and the Dutch West India Company (1636-1792)

The relationship between Aruba and the Netherlands is to a large extent rooted in the Eighty Years' War for independence between the Dutch Republic and the Spanish (1568 - 1648), which broke out under rule of Philip II, who acceded to the throne upon the death of his father, Charles V. This war was one of the main incentives for the Dutch to conquer Spanish and Portuguese colonies in the West. In 1593-94 direct Dutch trade with the Caribbean territory began. From its inception, there was a call for a trading company for this region similar to the Dutch East India Company (Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie/VOC). The protagonists of war with Spain were the first to propose this Dutch West India Company, the WIC (Schmidt 2001:175). The realization of the company took some time, mainly because in 1609 the Dutch Republic reached an understanding with Spain; in exchange for a temporary truce, which would last for twelve years, the Republic would refrain from trading in the West Indies.

In 1621, the year the treaty ended, the ideas for a West India Company were rekindled and a joint-stock company called the "Geortroyeerde West-Indische Compagnie" (WIC) was established. The WIC obtained a charter from the government of the Republic, which gave them the exclusive (Dutch) rights to trade in West Africa and everywhere west of there. The organization of the WIC was similar to that of the Dutch East India Company, which had held the rights on trade with Asia since 1602. According to the historians Ann Carlos and Stephen Nicholas, the defining characteristic of a modern business enterprise is "a hierarchy of salaried managers who make basic decisions over production, distribution, and prices" (1988:418). These authors further suggest that because of the innovating role they played in developing precisely this business system, 16th and 17th century trading companies like the WIC should be considered analogous to multinationals (*Ibid.*). Those who oppose this notion argue that even though the WIC and VOC possess many characteristics of a modern enterprise, there is an important difference: both the VOC and the WIC intertwined public and private stakes in a complex way that is considered alien to modern enterprises (Den Heijer 2005:216-217).

Similar to a modern company, the WIC was led by a board of directors, consisting of nineteen members, known as the Heren XIX, and it relied on private investors. Finding the investors necessary to establish the WIC proved relatively unproblem-



- Monogram of the WIC, or Geoctroyeerde West-Indische Compagnie (Spruit 1988:23).

atic. Even though it was a high risk venture, and the investment was without any securities, the company raised in two years seven million guilders, for the time a formidable amount (Den Heijer 2005:70). Not solely a private enterprise, the WIC relied on state subsidy to supplement the money brought by shareholders. This meant that the agenda of the WIC had both a commercial component (advancing the interests of their shareholders), as well as strong state component (Advancing the Dutch Republic's geopolitical objectives) (Pomeranz and Topik 2005:157). Although these two components were sometimes at odds with each other, they were certainly not mutually exclusive.

A document published in the 17th century historical work, *Saken van Staet in Oorlogh in ende omtrent de Vereenigte Nederlanden*, written by Lieuwe van Aitzema (a Dutch diplomat, spy, and historian), asserts that public money was not solely pumped in the WIC with the prospect of profit, but mainly to damage the enemy (Van Aitzema 1669:351). In some respects, government support made the WIC a kind of state war machine and at the same time a commercial trading company. There was some profit to be made by war with Spain, but even without this profit the perspective of damaging Spain was an important objective for the WIC. This is illustrated in the year-by-year report on the WIC ("Jaerlijck verslag") of geographer and director of the WIC, Joannes de Laet. In this report, he not only keeps an account of the profits made by war on Spain; he also keeps track of the damages done to Spain, which remained without direct monetary profit (De Laet IV, 1644).

The fact that the WIC was not only a private company with the sole interest of profit is underscored by the self-imposed moral obligation of the company to 'free' the "Indians" and to grant them their natural "*libertie*." This illustrates an ideological rationale, which is not really surprising considering that one of the main incentives for war with Spain was the desire for religious freedom. When the Republic's war for independence ended, the colonial policy emerged as more pragmatic (Oostindie and Paasman 1998:349). This moral obligation, combined with the pragmatic economic interest in exploiting the Amerindians, led to a very ambiguous attitude within the WIC. From a modern-day standpoint, juxtaposing this idealistic component with the atrocities of the slave trade, it is tempting to dismiss it altogether. This, however,

would be a mistake. Its seriously flawed character notwithstanding, there is enough evidence that points to the fact that, at least on some occasions, the WIC took its own mission to 'save' the "Indians" seriously (Schmidt 2001:xxvi).

Nonetheless, this seemingly dualistic approach of the WIC might help explain some of the company's idiosyncratic behavior with respect to the position of the Amerindian inhabitants of Aruba. Under the rule of the WIC, the Amerindians had a different position than they had under the Spanish regime. The Spanish reasoned from the idea that heathens (non-Christians) should not really be considered human. Within Dutch jurisdiction Amerindians were subject to the same laws as the Dutch colonists. Furthermore, it was prohibited to enslave Amerindians. Interestingly, this was not the case for Amerindians outside this jurisdiction. This double standard led to a peculiar differentiation between 'our' Amerindians and 'other' Amerindians, something that is also exemplified by the fact that even though the Amerindians were subject to the same laws as the Dutch colonists, in reality, the quality of life for the Amerindians was poor, and there is ample evidence of discrimination (Hartog 1980:56, 57).

The WIC acquired trading posts and factories in North America, South America, (Brazil, Surinam, The Antilles) and Africa (van Hoesel and Narula 1999:35). In South America, their main focus was Brazil (Roy Prak 2005:98). This also incited the Dutch to start trading in slaves: the Portuguese controlled most of the slave trade. Competing with the Portuguese would automatically mean entering into the slave-trade (Pomeranz and Topik 2005:157). So, in spite of the aforementioned ideological goals, the company's commercial character and the geopolitical goals of the company got the upper hand. The WIC embraced the slave trade to such an extent that slaves became its main form of trade.

The origin of the Dutch colonization of Aruba is closely related to their interests in Brazil and to the WIC's new focus on the slave trade. After the WIC lost its Caribbean base on Sint Maarten, it elected to build a new one on Curaçao, an island significantly closer to Brazil. In July 1634, Johannes Van Walbeeck, the first governor of the Netherlands Antilles, arrived on Curaçao with a fleet of six ships and 225 soldiers. (By conquering Aruba, Bonaire and Curaçao, the WIC hoped to gain a distribution point for slaves and a strategic stronghold in the Caribbean [Roy and Prak 2005:111]). On August 21 of that year, the Spanish commander, Lope Lopez de Morla, surrendered, and Van Walbeeck became director/governor of the area. It

is fairly certain that two years later, in the year 1636, Van Walbeeck took possession of Aruba, although aside from his documented intention to do so, no real record of this event exists. As did the Spanish before him, Van Walbeeck decided that the island of Curaçao was to be the main island, and that Aruba and Bonaire would be subordinate to Curaçao (De Laet IV:1644, 304). According to Hartog, by the end of 1636, the island was reported to be uninhabited. (Hartog 1953:45-6; Dijkhoff 1997:86; Linville 2005:88). However, as Dijkhoff suggests, it is possible that some of the inhabitants remained hidden on the island (Dijkhoff 1997:86).

Van Walbeeck did not immediately conquer Aruba and Bonaire. It is uncertain why he waited so long. It seems his fear that the Spanish may attack Curaçao from the neighboring islands eventually drove him to conquer these islands. At the end of 1635, the WIC ship *de Swaluwe*, sailing near the coast of Aruba for only the second time, encountered and captured a small Spanish boat, about which De Laet reports the following:

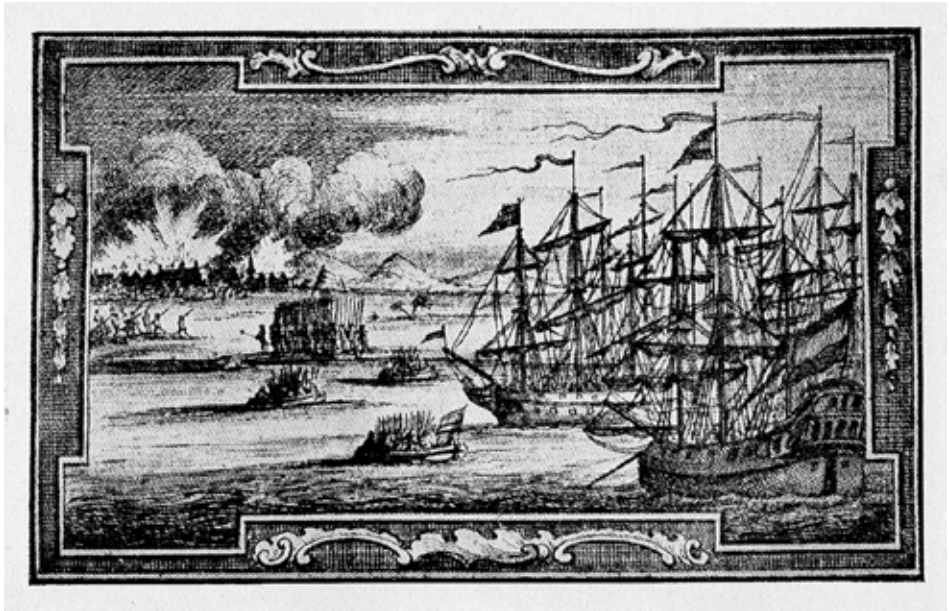
Aen Aruba bequamen een Passaet-Barcxken met neghen ghevanghens: uyt de welcke verstonden aen-gaende de toerusthinghe vande vyandt teghen het eylandt [De Laet, 1644, 187].

From Aruba we received a Bark with nine prisoners, from whom we heard about the enemy's mobilization against the island." [translation by the author].

Because he feared Spanish and Catholic influences, Van Walbeeck advised the Heeren XIX that should the WIC decide to colonize these islands (referring primarily to Curaçao), it would be preferable to use either Dutch citizens or slaves from Angola, instead of the native Amerindians:

T'waer na mijn gevoelen de Compagnie geraden, so verre alhier Colonien wilden planten, deselve van onse eigenen natie te nemen, oft anders nieu ofte varsch affgescheepte negros van Angola hier te stellen, die van onse regering ende religie niet vervreemt en syn, als die geen, die langh met de Spagnaerts gehanteert hebben [Van Walbeeck in De Laet IV:305].

I would advise the company, in the case they decide to colonize, to do so with people from either our own nation or new or freshly shipped negro slaves from Angola, who are not indoctrinated against our government and religion like those who



- Van Walbeek's conquest of Curaçao in 1634 (Menkman 1942:40-41).

But fate took another course. The Spanish re-conquest would not take place, and the huge influx of Dutch settlers or slaves did not transpire, at least not for Aruba. There would not be large amounts of Dutch settlers or slaves. Next to Van Walbeek, as director for Curaçao, two governors presiding under the command of van Walbeek were installed, one for Aruba and one for Bonaire. For them the title of governor was soon changed to lieutenant-governor (commander). It is unclear when the first lieutenant-governor was installed. The first mention of a separate lieutenant-governor for Aruba is found in the writings on the life of Jan Erasmus Reining, which speaks of an Irishman who went by the name of Williams (Hartog 1980:47-48).⁴

It is of crucial importance that, in spite of van Walbeek's letter to the Heren IX, the WIC prohibited private settlement on the island. The reason for this is twofold. On the one hand the WIC decided (as had the Spanish before them) that Aruba was useless for agricultural exploitation, yet, on the other hand, they still considered the

⁴ The fact that the Dutch left an Irishman in charge of the island is not atypical. It was not uncommon to hire foreigners during this pre-nationalistic period, take for example the Italians Amerigo Vespucci and Christopher Columbus, or the banking firm of the Welsers. In addition to this, the VOC and the WIC were after all 'private' companies that could employ anyone they deemed fit. It is generally assumed that, although most of the ships' captains were Dutch, large portions of their crews were also foreign (Van Gelder 1997:53).

island their 'property' and of strategic value for anyone trying to conquer Curaçao. The ban on settlement did not apply to Amerindians. It gave them the opportunity to repopulate the island. For a while the lieutenant-governor was the only European on the island. According to Dutch historian Johan Hartog (1980: 47-48), the interference in Aruban affairs from the Curaçao headquarters was so minimal that the lieutenant-governor, was colloquially referred to as "Opperhoofd des Eylands Aruba" (Chieftain of the Island Aruba)[translation by the author].

Until at least 1750 Aruba was effectively an Amerindian reservation. The only non-Amerindians on the island were the personnel of the WIC, including the lieutenant-governor, his assistant and slaves, and about ten to twenty soldiers. It is assumed that the Amerindian population consisted of the Caquetío who had escaped deportation in 1515 (or were brought back), and/or new immigrants from Venezuela and Colombia (Versteeg and Ruiz 1995:56, 67). This indicates that, from the perspective of the WIC, the island remained isolated. The importance of this isolation becomes clear when we consider the fact that, as a result of the free settlement of Amerindians, the ties with the mainland, temporarily cut by the deportation, were re-established in this period. In the times of the WIC Aruba mainly supported itself by trading with the mainland, a tradition that, as mentioned earlier on, likely goes back far further, interrupted only by the Spanish deportation of all of the island's the inhabitants. In addition to this, the WIC effectively supported smuggling on Aruba and Bonaire. Aruba and Bonaire were considered "permitted places," tax free zones. To avoid paying taxes, merchants would first bring their goods to Aruba before shipping them to Curacao (Klooster 1998:161). The ongoing Dutch indifference toward Aruba is underscored by the fact that the island regularly served as a hiding place and foraging point for pirates and privateers.

The main use the WIC had for the island was as a *rancho* for breeding horses. Aruba became somewhat less isolated when Mozes Maduro became the first non-Amerindian settler on Aruba. With this the WIC introduced a system of land tenure, closely resembling the feudal system. The WIC would 'loan' land to individuals who, in return, would perform certain services, such as cleaning the water wells. Significantly, the land would remain the sole property of the WIC. The contemporary Aruban system of long-lease land is a remnant of this policy. From approximately 1780 onwards, more and more settlers would arrive on Aruba, but seldom directly from Europe. In most cases, the settlers came from Curaçao or Bonaire (Hartog 1980:54, 69, 70).

The 18th century geographer Thomas Salmon, in his book of 1766, *A new Geographical and Historical Grammar*, writes: 'The Dutch islands of Bonaire and Aruba are considerable chiefly for their situation near the Coast of Terra Firma, which gave the inhabitants an opportunity of carrying on a clandestine trade with the Spanish settlements in Terra Firma' (Salmon 1767:600). By the beginning of the 19th century, G.B. Bosch, a visiting preacher from Curaçao, writes that Aruba then formed a community with the coastal region of Venezuela. According to him the Aruban sailors were familiar with the inhabitants of this region and spoke the same language (Bosch 1836:86).

The notion that Aruba's ties with the mainland were more important than its ties with the colonial government is also supported by the contact the predominantly Catholic inhabitants of the island had with the priests from the diocese of Coro, on the Venezuelan mainland. Noticing the disinterest of the colonial regime, the priests of Coro kept coming to Aruba, even after it was conquered by the WIC. There is a record from as early as 1668 that claims that the priests of Coro had been coming to the island for years (Alofs and Merckies 2001:14). In this light, it is safe to conclude that even though Aruba might not have been an important commercial centre, the presupposed isolation of the island is a misapprehension. From the foregoing, we can gather that for the Amerindians, as well as for the Dutch, the importance of the island lay in its geographic position.

Not long after the founding of the WIC it became apparent that the company was not economically viable. The initial capital was not sufficient to bear the enormous costs of the enterprise. Eventually (in 1674), stakeholders decided to liquidate the WIC. In the following year, a second West India Company was instated (Kunst 1981:75, 83). Although not without implications for Curaçao, this change went by fairly unnoticed on Aruba (Prins 1955:12-13). After the demise of this second West Indian Company in 1792, the 'care' for the colonies fell to the Dutch parliament, *de 'Staten-Generaal'*. For the first time, the Antilles were under direct government rule, which may be considered the beginning of Aruba's constitutional history.

The rediscovery of the island: Aruba and the Kingdom of the Netherlands (1792-1922)

The end of the WIC era coincided with turbulent times for Aruba, which persisted until the creation of the United Kingdom of the Netherlands at the Vienna Congress of 1815, *ipso facto* making Aruba part of a kingdom. In 1795, following the French Revolution, the French conquered the Dutch Republic, and created a new state, the Batavian Republic. This state, officially a separate state, was *de facto* under French influence. In 1806, unsatisfied with this state form, the French Emperor Napoleon transformed this state into the Kingdom of Holland, making his brother Louis the first King. This situation lasted until 1810, when the emperor decided to incorporate the Netherlands into the French Empire. The new political ties with France, with consequences noticed mainly in Europe, did have some (although not a lasting) effect on Aruba: The Dutch were dragged into a war between England and France, in which England occupied Aruba twice (Lang 2001:14-16).

None of these changes had a significant influence on Aruba. The changes from a new republic, to a kingdom, to a part of the French Empire were all too short-lived to have a lasting influence. The English occupation also did not result in lasting changes, with the exception of the vitally important abolition of the slave trade (Lang 2001:17) (a point which will be elaborated on later in this article). After 1815, the colonies came under the authority of King William I of the Netherlands. William's reign ushered in an attempt at a more stern policy for the Caribbean colonies. In order to recognize the cultural and geographic differences, the western colonies were divided into three separate entities: Surinam, Curaçao (with its dependent islands Bonaire and Aruba) and Sint-Eustatius (with its dependent islands Sint-Maarten and Saba). In 1828 this decision was overturned. In an attempt to cut costs, the western colonies were joined under one governor in Paramaribo. This, however, turned out to be an unworkable situation due to cultural differences; the western colonies were then divided into two parts, Surinam, and Curaçao (Oostindie and Klinkers 2001:15). The colonial policy in the West was relatively uninspired and inactive. The lesser importance of the West Indian colonies as a whole (when compared to Indonesia) was owing to their small size, low population and lesser economic potential. (Oostindie and Klinkers 2001:14).

King William I had an exaggerated idea of the economic importance of Curaçao and started a new Dutch Caribbean policy launched under the slogan "Return to pros-

perity,” an optimistic idea that never amounted to anything (Goslinga 1990:79). The problem with William’s new policy was that the prosperity of the western colonies had always been largely overestimated. The costs to the state to accommodate the slave-trade were simply too high. As early as the WIC era, it was clear that the Republic as a whole was not really benefiting from the slave-trade (Emmer 2006b:107-112). Only a small group of rich, influential merchants benefitted from the large expenditure of public money. Even with state subsidy the WIC never had been really profitable, and during the reign of King William I this would not change. Not until the 20th century did the colonies become more profitable. The disinterest of the WIC, and the failing colonial policy of the Kingdom, meant that Aruba enjoyed relative freedom, in religion, trade and government. The Arubans were not forced to embrace Dutch religion, although it is difficult to say if this was a consequence of some remnants of the Dutch Republic’s moral basis or just plain indifference.

The abolition of slavery and of the slave trade marked one of the first times in which the government was really actively involved with the colonies in the West. It is estimated that Dutch merchants, beginning in 1600, brought to the New World half a million slaves—five percent of the entire slave-trade (Emmer 2006a:49). It took the Dutch till 1863 to officially abolish slavery. (As mentioned earlier, the English had already abolished slavery [in 1807].) After 1850, the King and the government finally came to the realization that the slave trade had to come to an end. The reason that it took them until 1863 to realize this is in part a simple case of frugality: the Dutch government was worried about the question of compensation. They did *not* have compensation of the slaves in mind, but of the slave traders—a sad reminder of the fact that the grave injustices of slavery were still not really understood (Oostindie and Klinkers 2001:61).

The lasting indifference from the colonial government did not mean that Aruban society remained unchanged. As a detailed report of the population in 1816 indicates, settlers that began coming to the island beginning around 1780 drastically changed the composition of the population. According to this report, Aruba counted 1732 inhabitants: the population consisted of 4 Dutchmen, 187 inborn whites, 20 immigrated whites, 564 real “Indians,” 584 “coloured” free people, 37 free black people, 133 coloured slaves and 203 black slaves (Hartog 1980:125). These numbers show that Aruban society had started to shift from an ‘Indian reservation’ to a multicultural colony. However, this does not mean that early 19th century Aruba was considered

more than the Aruba of years past, something that is exemplified by Bosch's description of Aruba and Bonaire in the early years of the Kingdom of the Netherlands:

. . . zij deelen in hetzelfde lot als Curaçao: de droogte die er doorgaans heerscht, maakt dezelve voor alle cultuur ongeschikt. Zij hebben daarom gene andere waarde dan dat zij twee, en wel twee bewoonde eilanden van onze planeet zijn; dat zij onder de vaderlandsche bezittingen behoren; aan het gouvernement van Curaçao eenige voordelen pleegden aan te brengen; en dienden gekend te worden door zeelieden, die deze wateren bevaren [Bosch 1836:1].

. . . they shared the same fate as Curaçao: The drought that usually is predominant, makes it unfit for any kind of agriculture. Their only value is therefore that they are two inhabited islands of our planet; they are part of the fatherlands possessions; that they bring some advantages to the government of Curaçao; and that they are to be known to those who sail these waters [translation by the author].

In other words, Bosch thought the islands were quite useless. In contrast with this indifference, the inhabitants of Aruba seemed to display a great deal of love for their island. An anonymous Dutchman (possibly the same Bosch) recalls of his 1823 visit to Aruba that, in spite of the “barren, infertile soil,” the Arubans were proud of their land, were quite distraught when someone commented negatively on it, and when abroad always longed for their island (Anonymous 1824:666).

The 19th century would herald the end to the absolute indifference towards Aruba. Around the end of the first quarter of the 19th century, gold was discovered on the island. Exactly when and under what circumstances the gold rush began is unclear. According to Bosch, the discovery of a lump of gold in March of 1824 sparked this rush (Bosch 1836:225). From a colonial point of view, this discovery seemed a rediscovery of the island. While little had previously been written on the subject of Aruba, the discovery of the gold led to a surge in articles on the island, most of them on its geology. Hermanus Johannes Abbring, a captain-engineer stationed on Curaçao at the time the gold rush started, claims that there had always been rumors of the Aruban gold, rumors he even traced back to what he thought was the real origin of the name Aruba, namely the Spanish word for gold: *oro* (Abbring 1834:114). The true origin of the name “Aruba” remains unclear. There are other interpretations, one of the most of which is that Aruba means “Island of Shells” (Dijkhoff and Linville 2004:3).

The gold rush on Aruba had a great impact on the inhabitants. Many left their occupation to participate in the struggle to extract the riches from the soil. Bosch captures this change in a humorous account of the shortage of fish as a result of the gold rush:

Ook zijn, sedert men hier goud heeft beginnen te graven, de visschen, vooral de heerlijke koningsvisch, die in grootte en smakelijkheid voor den Hollandsche kabeljauw niet behoeft onder te doen, veel schaarscher en daardoor duurder geworden dan vroeger; niet omdat de vischen zich aan het goudgraven lieten gelegen liggen, maar omdat er aan derzelver bezit eene onvermijdelijke voorwaarde verbonden is, namelijk, om ze uit het water te halen; en dit stond in deszelfs belooning, naar de berekening der Arubasche visschers, niet gelijk met het graven van goud [Bosch:1836, 60].

Also, since people started digging for gold, the fishes, especially the delicious kingfish, that can compete with the Dutch Cod in size and taste, have become scarce and therefore more expensive; not because the fishes were much concerned with the gold digging, but the possession of fishes required getting them out of the water; which could in terms of reward, in the calculations of the Aruban fisherman, not live up to the digging of gold [translation by the author].

In July 1824, the Governor of Curaçao, Paulus R. Cantz'laar, received from Jacob Thielen I, the lieutenant-governor of Aruba, two letters reporting the discovery of gold. As far as we know, this prompted Cantz'laar to become the first Governor to visit Aruba since the days of Peter Stuyvesant. This sudden interest resulting from these unforeseen riches highlights the former neglect of the island by the colonial government. Almost immediately, the gold fields were declared non-free, and extra soldiers were sent to the island. Even the Dutch government abroad started to show interest in Aruba.

In addition to the gold rush, there was another influential change that took place in the 19th century: the discovery of phosphate. Initially, the Aruba Island Gold Mining Company from London demanded the rights on the phosphate. They claimed: "the exclusive right to the extraction of minerals from the soil of Aruba" ("het uitsluitend regt tot ontginning der delfstoffen bevattende gronden op Aruba") (quoted in Hartog 1980:156), and, therefore, the mining of phosphate was also their prerogative. Ultimately, the court dismissed the gold company's claim, and, in 1879, a concession

was given to the Aruba Island Phosphate Company Ltd. It was an enterprise that seemed doomed from the start. Already by December of the same year, its founder M. R. Sewel, together with local investors, abandoned the Aruba Island Phosphate Company and founded a new company, the Aruba *Phosphaat Maatschappij*, which subsequently bought the concession (Ridderstaat 2007:9-10).

Even though the bubble of the gold rush would eventually burst, the social effects of the gold and phosphate companies should not be underestimated. For many inhabitants, the run for gold marked an end to the traditional way of living. Furthermore, the island gained a heightened interest from the colonial government. The effect of the phosphate mining was not minimal. The company was erected at San Nicolas, where previously stood only a few fishermen's huts. Not only did the company create the town, it also created the need for a better infrastructure on the island. The company even produced its own money, which until then was quite scarce on the island (Hartog 1980:157-158). Taking the gold and phosphate companies into consideration, it is safe to say that the first steps toward a modern Aruba and the worldwide interest in the island date back from well before the oil era. In 1833, there were about 2,476 people living on Aruba. By 1893, the population had grown to 8,065, a considerable percentage increase in population. Thirty years later, in 1923, the population had only increased by slightly less than a 1,000, and kept hovering around this level until the oil age began (Ridderstaat 2007:17-18).

Corporate bloom: The boom of the oil refineries (1924-1986)

Before the 1920s, Aruba supported itself by means of the extraction of gold, salt, phosphate, and gold, and with fishing and cattle breeding. The most important form of agriculture was of aloe planting (Curaçao, Bonaire, and Aruba provided more than half of the aloe production in the world). The start of Aruba's industrialization brought great changes. A crucial impetus for this was the discovery in 1918 of petroleum in the Lake Maracaibo region. At this time, the Dictator Juan Vicente Gómez ruled over Venezuela. In order to overcome Venezuela's debts and retain economic stability, Gómez granted concessions to foreign oil companies. This policy, along with the country's cheap oil and favorable location, made Venezuela one of the most popular oil countries in the world at the time (McBeth 2002:1-2). The influence the oil companies had on Gómez should not be underestimated; when the oil companies

disliked the Venezuelan oil law, Gómez gave in to their pressure and let the companies and their lawyers draw up a new law, which the Venezuelan congress enacted obediently in 1922. Not surprisingly, the oilmen praised this law as the best oil law in South America (Ewell 1984:57). The impact of these Venezuelan developments is still felt in Aruba.

Aruba hosted two oil refineries, the Lago Oil & Petroleum Company Limited and the N.V. Arend Petroleum Maatschappij, also known as ‘Eagle.’ Although Eagle began refining oil before Lago, the arrival of Captain Rodger in 1924, a representative of the British Equatorial Oil Company, is usually seen as the start of the Aruban oil Era. Around this time, his company was bought up by the Canadian Lago Oil & Transport Company and renamed Lago Oil & Petroleum Company Limited. From this stems the colloquial name “Lago” sometimes still used when referring to the refinery. Lago was later taken over by Standard Oil of New Jersey (ESSO, later Exxon), which was originally a part of J. D. Rockefeller’s Standard Oil⁵. In 1927, the *Compania Mexicana de Petrol el Aquila* opened a refinery west of Oranjestad. This company was part of the “Royal Dutch Shell Group.” The refinery was named N.V. Arend Petroleum Maatschappij. The demographic and economic impact of this company remained limited compared to that of Lago (Alofs and Merkies 2001:51).

The building of a refinery on Aruba was not a foregone conclusion. This becomes clear when we realize that initially the British Equatorial Oil Company planned to build only a transshipment facility, and that Aruba was not the first place they visited in search of a suitable location. Another obstacle was the initial reluctance of the Dutch government to grant permission for the refinery, because it would compete with the Dutch Shell refinery on Curaçao. But it seems that fear of antagonizing the Americans was what eventually drove the Dutch government to budge (Shaffer 1983:60). The balance of power, as was the case in most of South America, had shifted from the original colonizers, the Spanish and the Portuguese, to the United States.

Because of Venezuela’s tumultuous political situation, the oil companies did not opt for the possibility to open a refinery on the mainland (The relatively stable political climates and favorable geographic locations of Aruba and Curacao made them more

⁵ Standard Oil once had such a powerful grip on the American oil business that in 1911 the Supreme Court of the United States ruled that it had an unreasonable monopoly and would have to be split into 34 separate companies, of which the Standard Oil Company of New Jersey was one.



- Lago employees returning home after a day of hard work (Lago Collection, National Archives Aruba)

suitable alternatives.) Gómez would later try to pressure Shell and Lago to locate their refineries in Venezuela by increasing buoy taxes on exported crude oil, but his efforts proved in vain. (McBeth 2002:176). After the death of the Gómez, public

opinion in Venezuela would turn against Shell and Standard Oil for their associations with him and his dictatorship (Singh 1989:89).

Although Aruba's geographic position relative to the oil fields was more favorable, the political primacy of Curacao, as the seat of government for the Dutch Caribbean islands, led Rodger to first consider his options there. The fact that Curacao's ports were already taken eventually drove him to consider Aruba (Alofs and Merkies 2001:49). Here he found what he was looking for in San Nicolas, the former phosphate town. Rodger favored Aruba's eastern tip over the harbor of Curaçao, despite the considerable costs of dredging out the harbor. One of the greatest advantages of San Nicolas was that Aruba is situated considerably closer to Lake Maracaibo than is Curacao. In this respect, Captain Rodger stated that 'this difference in haulage' would mean a yearly saving of many thousands of miles for Lago's lake tankers over those from other companies whose principle terminal was situated in Curacao (Croes 1987:13-14). Rodger had finely acknowledged Aruba's ideal geographic location, a fact that until then had been largely ignored, as the following passage indicates:

After about two weeks at San Nicolas studying the possibility of dredging a channel to the sea, the unanimous opinion was that this was the place and Messrs. Rodger, Clark, and Boyd confidently recommended it to the interested parties in London, feeling sure that no matter how great the expenditure required to cope with the dredging, a good channel could be found and made into a bay, and the rest could be easy [quoted in Ridderstaat 2007:25].

The initial goal was simply to transfer crude oil from the small ships from Lake Maracaibo to bigger ships that were unable to reach the lake, but already during the first meetings with Administrator Jan Frederik ("Frits") Quast, the possibility of creating a refinery was discussed (Alofs and Merkies 2001:49). The first refinery became operational in January 1929. By this time, as a result of the diversity of the labor force needed for such large-scale construction work, the refinery had already turned into a melting pot of several nationalities, in which 21 languages were spoken. The operation of the complex refinery demanded skilled employees, who were not found in large enough numbers on Aruba. The Lago refinery of San Nicolas became a multicultural magnet, which kept on drawing people to the island long after the initial construction work had been finished (Ridderstaat 2007:40,47).

The construction of the refinery had triggered Aruba's economic and demographic boom. In less than a quarter of a century, Lago grew to the proportions of a company with an international allure, with around 7,000 workers of 56 different nationalities. In 1945, only 32% of the workers were Aruban nationals (Hartog 1980:317). World War II had an important effect on the island. Once again, a war started on European soil left its mark on Aruba. One in every sixteen gallons of oil for the allied airplanes was refined on the island (Hartog 1980:356). In her account of Aruban life, Laura Wernet-Paskel captures this interplay between the oil business and the war with a remark on the connections between Aruba's economic and demographic prosperity, Lago, and World War II:

Ja, aan de Lago—en de hemel vergeve het mij—aan de oorlog. Wie weet, misschien moest zelfs Hitler tot de ontdekking komen dat er'n eiland met de naam Aruba bestond in de Caribbean? En als de Lago er niet was, denk je dan dat we verrijkt zouden zijn met leden van zoveel rassen en naties? Nee, en hondermaal nee! Toen ik nog naar school ging, 20 jaar geleden, leerde ik in de aardrijkskunde: Aruba telt 11000 inwoners [Wernet 1992:17].

Yes, to the Lago—and heaven forgive me—to the war. Who knows, maybe even Hitler had discovered that there was an island named Aruba in the Caribbean? And if it wasn't for the Lago, do you think that we would have been enriched with members of so many races and nations? No, and a hundred times no! When I went to school, twenty years ago, I learned in the geography lessons that Aruba counted 11,000 inhabitants [translation by the author].

During the aftermath of World War II, it became apparent that the Lago refinery had become one of the most productive oil refineries in the world. This, in turn, impacted the island's labor market. Because most people took up jobs in either the refinery or in white-collar jobs that existed because of Lago, agriculture was almost wholly abandoned. After 1950, unionization of the labor force led to evermore substantial salary and fringe-benefit gains, which, in turn, led to the situation that Aruba had per capita one of the highest standards of living in the Americas (Angrosino 1982:97).

Although Lago was a modern company, it had, tantamount to the WIC, a profound effect on Aruban society. From a demographic point of view, however, this impact was the absolute opposite of that of the WIC: whereas the WIC discouraged settle-

ment, Lago actively promoted it. There is, however, a striking resemblance between the two companies. In the years 1924-1950, Lago was a major influence on the government and public life. Luc Alofs and Leontine Merckies capture this in their book, *Ken ta Arubiano*, when they name a paragraph on Lago “The government and the Lago: The Lago as government?” (*De overheid en de Lago: De Lago als overheid*). In the first years after the refinery came to Aruba, there was a tight collaboration between Lago and the administrators Quast and Wagemaker. Due to lack of experience, and a history of patriarchal relations with Curaçao, the Aruban government appeared unable to adapt to the rapidly changing situation (Hartog 1980:319-341).

Much of the impact of Lago is explained by the fact that Aruba’s way of life, and the state of its infrastructure, were not in tune with the company’s requirements. Lago aspired to fill this void, and took it upon itself to accommodate the necessary changes. The company arranged the infrastructure by constructing roads, shops, sport facilities, building a hospital, and a vocational training school, and providing entertainment for their employees. Lago actually seemed more influential than the government. Not only did the government depend on the money of Lago, also most of the other social structures depended equally on its donations (Alofs and Merckies 2001:64-65). All in all, it seemed as though 132 years after the demise of the second WIC in 1792, Aruba was once again in the grasp of a major corporation. During World War II, Lago management even seemed to ‘manage’ not only the company but even the entire island. In contrast to the WIC, Lago’s strong influence was short-lived. When the government took over most of the responsibilities, Lago took a step back.

Even though the interference of Lago subsided, the American management style remained dominant on Aruba (Ridderstaat 2007:188). Lago’s influence is perhaps best illustrated with the example of L. G. Smith, Lago’s general manager from 1933 till 1946. Following repeated changes in management during the early years, it was Smith who welded Lago and Aruba together (Hartog 1980:316). Since he was so influential, it is fitting that one of the most important streets, connecting Oranjestad and San Nicolas, was named after him, a lasting memory and a monument to Lago’s legacy.

It is safe to conclude that in its early years Lago was probably at least as influential as the WIC had ever been. For Aruba, this meant that not only did Lago’s influence exceed that of the Aruban government, it also overshadowed the Dutch government,

as though the imperialist sphere of influence over the island had shifted from Dutch colonial government to American oil magnates. Put into a broader Latin American perspective, Lago's hegemony is not the least bit surprising. In the oil producing countries of Latin America before the 1930's, conflicts between nation-states and foreign private companies were inevitable. The influence of these companies was so extensive that the governments began to question whether they were still in control of their own destinies (Brown 1985:362). A good example of this is that, as early as 1928, students protested against Gómez, whom they accused of squandering the nation's assets to the benefit of foreign companies (Rivas 2001:220).

New Beginnings, *Status Aparte* and Tourism (1986-present)

Not long after the war was over, the hey-day of the refinery came to an end. Venezuela had finally started refining its own oil, which, combined with the increasing automation of the oil business, meant downsizing and loss of jobs in Aruba. Because of this, the 1960s the Aruban economy experienced a downward spiral (Alofs and Merckies 2001:133). The changes in the structure of the international oil market, the increasing technical innovations of Lago, and the absence of any secondary sector, made it painfully clear that Aruba's economic growth between 1928 and 1948 had not been a self-supported process, but was solely founded on the dynamics of the refinery (Croes 1987:100). Aruba sought to overcome this loss of income from the oil industry through tourism. As early as the 1960s, the tourist policy, then chiefly concerned with cruise ships, started to become fruitful (Van Benthem and Van den Bergh et al. 1978:34). Lago did not close immediately; its decline dragged on until the early 1980s, around which time Aruba was in the process of becoming a separate state in the kingdom, with a status called *status aparte*.

To understand the situation at the time, it is important to shed some light on the events that led to the *status aparte*. Aside from a casual interest in Venezuelan politics, it was not until the 20th century that Arubans took a real interest in their own political situation. This interest began as a result of the economic prosperity Lago brought the island. According to Hartog, the interest in politics began as early as 1931-1932 (Hartog 1980:409-410). It was the new-found wealth that incited this interest. It led Arubans to want to take control of this new prosperity, and at the same time, it was the reason the Antillean government desired more control over Aruba. The actual cry for a separate status could already be heard in the 1950s, when Henny Eman, Sr., of

the AVP (*Arubaanse Volks Partij*), preached for a radical decentralization in the form of federal Dutch Antilles; he called this "separacion" (Reinders 1993:343).

In 1970, the situation changed drastically. Arubans who seemed more estranged than ever from Curaçao and the Dutch government started to think positively about decolonization. The result of this was that when, in the early 1980s, the Dutch government was found willing to accept the separate status, they attached the condition that the interim period should be a transitional phase that must culminate in independence in 1996. Betico Croes and his MEP (*Movimiento Electoral di Pueblo*) agreed with these terms, but under protest. They were unhappy with these terms because they thought a ten year decolonization period was far too short. Not only would this mean that Aruba would have to face grave economic problems, it also meant the island would have to face them alone (Reinders 1993:343-345). Just before realizing the *status aparte*, Lago was on the brink of closing down. This dark cloud hanging over Aruba gave rise to the idea that maybe it would be best to postpone the *status aparte*. Croes, the foremost proponent of the separation, would not hear of any delays and replied to these concerns as follows: "we will go on, even if it means to make backwards steps. We will obtain our status apartus, rich or poor" (quoted in Ridderstaat 2007:169). This was a bold statement considering Aruba's precarious economic situation and the seemingly imminent decolonization.

As a last resort, to try and stop the refinery from closing, Croes planned talks with President Lusinchi of Venezuela and President Reagan of the United States, commenting prophetically that should this effort fail, Aruba would land in a worst case scenario in which tourism would be left as the principal pillar of the economy (Ridderstaat 2007:172). The desperate attempts to keep Lago running proved in vain. As Croes had emphasized, the closing of Lago did not have a profound effect on the *status aparte*, aside from the fact that maybe it would mean "an austere *status aparte* instead of a lavish one". Although the decline of Lago did not influence the *status aparte*, the uncertainty this new regime brought might have led Exxon to close the refinery. There is, however, no evidence to support this assumption (Ridderstaat 2007:174-175, 178).

In the end, things did not turn out as grim as was feared. Even though Aruba landed in Croes' worst-case scenario, the worst turned out to be better than anybody could have imagined. The decline of Lago prompted Aruba to explore new ways to sustain its economy. This time the island used its former weak points to bring about eco-

nomic prosperity. The scorching sun and the arid climate (always major hindrances to agriculture), combined with island's beaches, proved great assets for tourism. Yet, attracting tourists to Aruba initially proved no easy feat. At the time, Aruba was not very well known either in the tourism sector or in the financial sector. In 1986, in a bid to move the economy in the direction of tourism, the government began an aggressive program to develop the tourist industry on the island. The government went to great lengths to attract world-class partners to help develop hotel and resort properties. In order to lure the developers to the island, the government provided loan guarantees and offered fiscal exemptions and other tax advantages. Especially the loan guarantees entailed considerable risks, but desperate times seemed to call for desperate measures. While some of the projects failed, in the end, the successes exceeded the failures (Croes 2000:57). An obvious, but unavoidable, drawback of this policy was that many of the hotels would be either foreign-owned, or paid for with foreign loans.

By 1978, tourism had already become the third largest sector on the island (after the oil industry and trade). This was, however nothing compared with the tourism boom directly after the *status aparte* of 1986; the number of hotel rooms increased from 2400 in 1985 to 6500 in 1995. The government policy catapulted Aruba's economic and demographical growth. The policy was to build as many hotel rooms as possible. In 1990 and 1991, this resulted in the completion of some big luxurious hotels.⁶ In 2007 the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was 4,334 million Florin, which per capita amounted to 42,154 Florin; this compared to other Caribbean states was quite high.⁷ For example, the GDP of the Bahamas was 33,947, Florin, that of Netherlands Antilles 31,773 Florin and that of the Dominican Republic 5,882 Florin (CBS 2007:15).

Even after Lago's demise, the American presence on the island would be felt, and to a lesser extent the same goes for the Venezuelan presence. Most of the tourists staying on the island hail from the United States. In, 2004, 531,287 Americans came to the island, and 535,655 visited in 2008. The second more frequent nationality in terms of tourism to Aruba is that of Venezuela, totaling 59,218 in 2004 and as many as 112,329 in 2008. Most of the other tourists hail from Colombia, Canada, The Netherlands and the Caribbean (CBS 2009:51).

⁶ Three were not finished; for this the government was held accountable (Haan 1998:71, 92).

⁷ At 144,410, Bermuda was an exception.

With the success of tourism, Aruba prospered, and, yet again, the island experienced a demographic boom. Since Aruba gained its *status aparte* in 1986, it has continued to rely heavily on migration to meet the increasing demand of labor. The fast economic growth drawn immigrants who, in turn, contributed to the island's prosperity. While the total population of Aruba numbered 60,312, in 1981, by 1991 it had increased to 90,500, and in 2003 to 95,000, making Aruba the second most densely populated island (after Barbados) in the Caribbean (IMF 2005:8-9). This seems like an unbridled growth. These results were, however, already foretold in the 1973 prognosis for the year 2000 of the Central Bureau of Statistics of the Netherlands Antilles. These calculations estimated the Aruban population for that year between 86,100 and 95,600 (CBS, Curacao 1973:13). Population growth did not cease. By 2007, the population had grown to 104,494 (CBS 2007), and by 2008, to 106,050 (CBS 2009:1). The immigration created problems for Aruba; its local infrastructure had difficulties coping with this growth. Yet, the economic growth would have been impossible without these immigrants.

Immigration had a major impact on Aruban society. As I have shown, the multicultural character of Aruba can be traced back through the centuries. But, in contrast to the 20th century, the immigration in earlier centuries had always been a gradual process. The Aruban society seemed unable to keep up with the rapid pace of the change sparked by Lago and tourism. This initially led to a fragmented society. According to Alofs and Merkies, until 1985, Aruban social relations were divided along ethnic lines. But it did not take long for the *status aparte* and the flexibility of Aruban society to come to terms with this change. Alofs and Merkies assert that even as early as 1986-1988, a thaw in this seemingly rigid demarcation along ethnic lines could be identified (Alofs and Merkies 2001:185-187). This development, combined with the economic prosperity of the more recent decades seems to have ushered Aruba into the 21st century as a modern economy and archetypical multicultural society.

Conclusion

In this brief review of Aruban history, three main themes can be discerned, running through the continuum of time. The first is that the bonds between Aruba and the Venezuelan mainland, specifically the Lake Maracaibo region, have been stronger than most people generally assume, and have been so throughout the entire period described in this article. The island of Aruba has not been nearly as isolated as is often assumed. The bonds that existed in pre-Columbian times between Aruba and the coast have never really ceased to exist. Although through the centuries these ties may have been influenced by diverse factors (group affiliation, family, trade, religion, smuggling, political refugee influx), their influence on the island was ever-present. Taking the heterogeneity of these bonds into account, we should realize that the primary thing they really have in common is that they stem from the island's proximity to Venezuela. Archaeological research aside, these ties have not received the attention they deserve. It is my contention that the historical research on Aruba would benefit from more attention to this aspect of the island's history.

The second main theme of Aruban history is that the multicultural character of Aruba is an integral part of this history. The multicultural history of Aruba includes a host of different influences, from the early Spanish, Dutch and English, to the strong permeating presence of the American and English companies. All of these influences break down into a myriad of cultural influences from all over the globe, influences that make Aruba a classic example of a multicultural society. This assessment does not detract at all from the uniqueness of Aruban culture; if anything, it identifies this multicultural character as an integral part of Aruban culture.

The third and last recurring theme in Aruban history is closely linked with the history of multinational entrepreneurship. In this regard, the WIC of the 17th and 18th centuries, and Lago Oil Company of the 20th century bear a strong resemblance, yet exhibit an interesting and significant difference: while the earlier of these multinationals kept immigrants away, the latter drew them to the island intentionally. Both companies are prime examples of foreign 'multinational' companies with a strong and lasting influence on the island, not only in an economic but also in a political sense. In both cases, a relatively small island community became subject to the dynamics of a large corporation. The WIC, as well as Lago, purposely shaped society to make it fit their needs. The grasp each company had on the island pervaded different levels, creating a hybrid of corporate and political influence. After World War

II, the influence of Lago started to disappear and the cry for emancipation of the Aruban people got stronger. After the demise of Lago Oil Company in 1984, and the instatement of the status aparte in 1986, Aruba has, in many respects, attained a more autonomous status. Although the island is still subject to external dynamics through tourism and the influence of foreign companies, it has demonstrated an ability to withstand the storms of globalization. Aruba finely seems to have found its place in the sun.

- drs. Eduard Dresscher

About the author

Eduard Dresscher (historian & philosopher) was born in 1980 in Groningen, The Netherlands. He studied Cultural History and the Philosophy of History at the University of Groningen, where he also studied Philosophy, specializing in Social Philosophy, Professional Ethics, and the Philosophy of Literature. He has researched professional ethics in teaching for Education International (Brussels), and has written on Nationalism through the ages (Geschiedenis Magazine). He recently moved to Aruba.

References

- Abbring, H. J.
1834 *Weemoedstoonen uit de geschiedenis van mijn leven, of, Mijne reis naar Curaçao, en vlugtige beschouwingen van dat eiland gedurende mijn tienjarig verblijf op hetzelfde.* W. Van Boekeren, Groningen.
- Aitzema, L. van
1669 *Saken van Staet in Oorlogh in ende omtrent de Vereenigde Nederlanden, Beginnende met het jaer 1633, ende eyndigende met het jaer 1644* II Johan Veely, Johan Tongerloo and Jasper Doll's,-Gravenhage.
- Alofs, L., and L. Merckies
2001 *Ken ta Arubiano, Sociale integratie en natievorming op Aruba 1924-200.* De Wit Stores, Oranjestad.
- Angrosino, M.
1982 Personal Narratives and Cultural Complexity: An Oral Anthropology of Aruba, Netherlands Antilles. *The Oral History Review* 10:93-118.
- Anonymous
1824 Een bezoek op Aruba en Bonaire, door een in laatstgenoemde Gewest gevestigd Nederlander' *Vaderlandse letteroefeningen of tijdschrift van kunsten en wetenschappen*, tweede stuk voor, 661-673.
- Bosch, G. B.
1836 *Reizen in West-Indië: en door een gedeelte van Zuid- en Noord-Amerika.* L. E. Bosch, Utrecht.
- Brown, J. C.
1985 Why Foreign Oil Companies Shifted Their Production from Mexico to Venezuela during the 1920s. *The American Historical Review* 90:2 (Apr.):362-385.
- Carlos, A. M. and S. Nicholas
1988 Giants of an Earlier Capitalism: The Chartered Trading Companies as Modern Multinationals. *The Business History Review* 62: 3 (Autumn):398-419.
- Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek
1973 *Voorlopige vooruitberekening van het bevolkingsaantal der Nederlandse Antillen tot het jaar 2000.* CBS, Curaçao.
- Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek
1983 *Senso '81, Tweede algemene volks- en woningtelling Nederlandse Antillen, Toestand per 1 februari 1981* serie b publicatie nr.1 geselecteerde tabellen. CBS, Curaçao.

- Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek
2007 *Statistical Orientation 2007*. CBS, Oranjestad.
- Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek
2008 *Demographic Profile 2007*. CBS, Oranjestad.
- Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek
2009 *Statistical Yearbook 2008*. CBS, Oranjestad.
- Coomans-Eustatia, M., and H. E. Coomans
1987 *Bibliography of the Archaeology and the Amerindians of the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba*. Reports of the Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology of the Netherlands Antilles 6. Curaçao.
- Croes, R. M.
1987 *Welvaart zonder ontwikkeling, De invloed van de oliemaatschappijen op de Arubaanse Economie 1928-1948*. Caraïbische Afdeling KITLV, Leiden, Nederland.
- Croes, R. R.
2000 *Anatomy of Demand in International Tourism: The Case of Aruba*. Van Gorcum, Assen.
- Dijkhoff, R. A. C. F.
1997 *Tankiflip/ Henriquez: An Early Urumaco Site in Aruba*. Unpublished Master's thesis, Leiden University, Leiden.
- Dijkhoff, R. A. C. F., and Linville, M.S. (eds.)
2004 *The Archaeology of Aruba: The Marine Shell Heritage*. Publications of the Archaeological Museum of Aruba 10. AMA, Oranjestad.
- Dijkhoff, R. A. C. F.
2009 Aruba 500 Years? *Historia di Aruba*.
<http://web.archive.org/web/20010412153456/arubafm.com/aruba5001.htm>,
(accessed July 8, 2009).
- Emmer, P. C.
2006 Nederland als leerling: de buitenlandse invloeden op de opkomst en neergang van de Nederlandse slavenhandel en slavernij. In *Nederland als voorbeeldige natie*, edited by Noort, W. van et al. Uitgeverij Verloren, Hilversum.
- Emmer, P. C.
2006 *The Dutch Slave Trade, 1500-1850*. Berghahn Books, Oxford.
- Gelder, R. van
1997 Het Oost-Indisch avontuur. Duiters in dienst van de VOC (1600-1800). SUN, Nijmegen.

- Goslinga, C. Ch.
1990 *The Dutch in the Caribbean and in Surinam 1791/5- 1942*. van Gorcum, Assen.
- Goslinga, C. Ch.
1979 *A Short History of the Netherlands Antilles and Surinam*. Martinus Nijhoff, Den Haag.
- Haan, T. J.
1998 *Antilliaanse instituties, De economische ontwikkeling van de Nederlandse Antillen en Aruba, 1969-1995*. Labyrint Publication, Cappele a/d IJssel.
- Hartog, J.
1980 *Aruba zoals het was zoals het werd, Van de tijd der indianen tot op heden*. Van Dorp, Oranjestad.
- Heijer, H. J. den
2005 *De geotrooieerde compagnie: de VOC en de WIC als voorlopers van de naamloze wetenschap*, Ars Notariatus 128. Kluwer, Amsterdam.
- Hoesel, R. van and Narula, R. (eds.)
1999 *Multinational enterprises from the Netherlands*. Routledge, New York.
- IMF
2005 *Kingdom of the Netherlands—Aruba: Selected Issues and Statistical Appendix*. June IMF Country Report No. 05/203.
- Israel, J. I. (Smilde, B. translation)
2008 *De Republiek: 1477-1806*. Uitgeverij Van Wijnen, Franeker.
- Klooster, W.
1998 *Illicit Riches, Dutch Trade in the Caribbean, 1648-1795*. KITLV Press.
- Kunst, A. J. M.
1981 *Recht, commercie en kolonialisme in West-Indië*. De Walburg Pers, Zutphen.
- Lang, M.
2001 *Die Entwicklung des Unternehmensrechts der Niederländischen Antillen*. Waxmann Verlag, Münster.
- Laet, J. de
1644 *Iaerlyck verhael van de Verrichtinghen der Geotroyeerde West-Indische Compagnie in der-thien Boecken* Deel IV Abraham and Bonaventure Elsevier, Leiden.
- Linville, M. S.
2005 *Marine Shell as Medium in Amerindian Aruba*, Volume I. Ph.D. dissertation. Department of Anthropology, The Graduate School and University Center of The City University New York.

- McBeth, B. S.
2002 *Juan Vicente Gómez and the Oil Companies in Venezuela, 1908-1935*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Menkman, W. R.
1942 *De Nederlanders in het Caraïbische Zeegebied. De Geschiedenis der Nederlandsche Antillen*. P. N. van Kampen & Zoon B. V., Amsterdam.
- Oostindie, G. and I. Klinkers
2001 *Knellende koninkrijksbanden: het Nederlandse dekolonisatiebeleid in de Caraïben, 1940-2000*. Amsterdam University Press, Amsterdam.
- Oostindie, G. and B. Paasman
1998 Dutch Attitudes Towards colonial Empires, indigenous Cultures, and Slaves. *Eighteenth Century Studies* 31:3 (Spring):349-355.
- Pomeranz, K. and S. Topik
2005 *The World that Trade Created: Society, Culture, and the World Economy, 1400-the Present*. M.E. Sharpe, New York.
- Prins, E. J.
1955 *Ontstaan en overzicht van de rechten op de gronden op Aruba*.
- Reinders, A.
1993 *Politieke geschiedenis van de Nederlandse Antillen en Aruba 1950-1993*. Walbur Pers, Zutphen.
- Ridderstaat, J. R.
2007 *The Lago Story. The compelling story of an oil company on the island of Aruba*. Editorial Charuba, Oranjestad.
- Rivas, D.
2001 Like Boxing with Joe Louis: Nelson Rockefeller in Venezuela, 1945-1948. In *Empire and revolution: the United States and the Third World since 1945*, edited by P. L. Hahn and M. N. Heiss, pp. 217 - 241. Ohio State University Press, Columbus.
- Roy Prak, M. and D. Webb
2005 *The Dutch Republic in the Seventeenth Century: the Golden Age*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Salmon, T.
1767 *A new Geographical and Historical Grammar*, Edinburgh.
- Schmidt, B.
2001 *Innocence Abroad: the Dutch Imagination and the New World, 1570-1670*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

- Schwengle, S., and J. Walhain
 1998 *Van Aloë tot Olie*. Oranjestad Printing, Aruba.
- Shaffer, E.
 1983 *The United States and the control of World Oil*. Taylor & Francis, London.
- Singh, K.
 1989 Oil Politics in Venezuela during the Lopez Contreras Administration (1936-1941). *Journal of Latin American Studies* 1 (Feb.): 89-104.
- Spruit, R.
 1988 *Zout en Slaven. De geschiedenis van de West Indische Compagnie*. De Haan, Houten.
- Versteeg, A. H.
 1991 *The Indians of Aruba*. Publication of the Archaeological Museum Aruba 4. Oranjestad: AMA.
- Versteeg, A. H. and A. C. Ruiz
 1995 *Reconstructing Brasilwood Island: The Archaeology and Landscape of Indian Aruba*. Publication of the Archaeological Museum Aruba 6. Oranjestad: AMA.
- Wernet-Paskel, L.
 1992 *Ons Eilandje Aruba*. Walburg Pers, Zutphen.



UWoca

УВООСА

УВООСА